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STAFF NOTES:

Latin American Trends

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Chile: Prisoner Release Program Underway

The government has begun to make good on its promise to release many political prisoners. The pace of the program could be slowed, however, by reluctance on the part of other nations to receive more Chilean refugees.

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When he announced the initiative on September 11, junta President Pinochet implied that only prisoners who agreed to leave Chile would be released. It now appears that at least some prisoners will, in fact, be freed and allowed to remain in the country. On the other hand, the government has begun using a decree law issued last year to expel "political activists". It has arrested, but not brought to trial. The number of prisoners who will fall into the various categories cannot yet be determined. It seems likely, however, that several thousand Chileans soon will be looking for new homes abroad amid a general lack of enthusiasm for receiving them.

The negative attitude in Europe appears to be due primarily to economic considerations. Whatever the reasons, for reluctance to receive more refugees, resettlement problems may compel Santiago to allow more former prisoners to remain in the country. This probably will slow the release program somewhat.

The government is likely to castigate publicly harsh foreign critics who now fail to give refuge to the "oppressed" Chileans about whom they have professed to be so concerned. Chile also has not forgotten Pinochet's call on the Soviet Union and Cuba to free some of their political prisoners. Santiago


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has been collecting names of prisoners from friends and relatives and urging international organizations to press Moscow and Havana on the issue.. Foreign Minister Carvaial probably will raise the matter anew in his upcoming speech to the UN General Assembly.



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